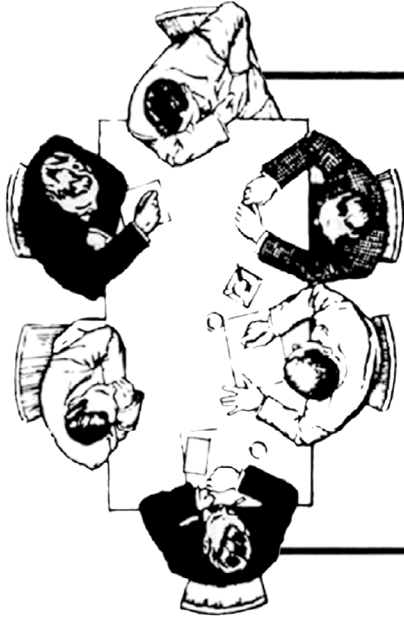


The All-Volunteer Armed Forces



Status, Prospects and Alternatives

William R. King

For most of its history, the United States has supported its peacetime defense establishment on a volunteer basis. However, within most of the lifetime of most living Americans, peacetime military conscription has been the accepted practice.¹

The United States returned to its traditional peacetime practice when, on 27 January 1973, Secretary of Defense Melvin R. Laird announced that the armed forces henceforth would depend exclusively on volunteer soldiers, sailors, airmen and marines. This termination of more than three decades of military conscription came after nearly a decade of study by the Department of Defense (DOD) and other interested parties.

The decision to move to an all-volunteer force (AVF) was made prior to 27 March 1969 when President Nixon appointed an advisory commission on an all-volunteer armed force under the chairmanship of The Honorable Thomas S. Gates Jr., former secretary of defense. The President's statement announcing the formation of the commission charged it with developing "... a comprehensive plan

for eliminating conscription and moving toward an all-volunteer armed force."²

The "Gates Commission" chose to address two general questions which appear to be of broader scope than the charge given by the President:

- ◆ Is an all-volunteer force feasible?
- ◆ Regardless of whether an all volunteer force is feasible, is it desirable?³

On 20 February 1970, the commission submitted its report. Its essence is summed up in two paragraphs from Secretary Gates' letter of transmittal:

We unanimously believe that the nation's interests will be better served by an all-volunteer force, supported by and effective stand-by draft, than by a mixed force of volunteers and conscripts; that steps should be taken promptly to move in this direction; and that the first indispensable step is to remove the present inequity in the pay of men serving their first term in the armed forces.

We have satisfied ourselves that a volunteer force will not jeopardize national security, and we believe it will have a beneficial effect on the military as well as the rest of our society.⁴

The administration accepted the commission's recommendation in principle, but extended the recommended timetable for two years until 1 July 1973. Congress approved a two-year extension of induction authority until that date, thus creating a "transition period" extending from 1970 until January 1973 when the draft actually ended.

The transition period was one of planning and experimentation for DOD. During that uncertain period, many officials and laymen were doubtful that the Gates Commission's conclusions were valid. The fact that the draft was ended six months ahead of schedule in January 1973 undoubtedly reflects both effective planning and the influence of uncontrollable factors such as the economy and declines in the magnitude of the war-stimulated need for large military forces. However, as Binkin and Johnston state in their 1973 study of the transitional achievements in preparing for the AVF:

Taken together, these achievements suggest that this nation can accomplish what no other nation has ever attempted—to maintain an active armed force of over two million men and women on a voluntary basis.⁵

Since the AVF was instituted fully in 1973, many skeptics appear to have been converted. The AVF is in existence and DOD routinely produces statistics which demonstrate that the military forces generally

are meeting targets, that the "quality" of accessions is improving and, generally, that the concept is working.

However, disquieting rumors, magazine and newspaper articles⁶ and study results⁷ that had circulated widely concerning the status, viability and effectiveness of the AVF were given greater credibility in 1976 by a report of the Defense Manpower Commission which concluded that:

The sustainability of the All Volunteer Force

during peacetime will depend upon the economic situation and other interrelated factors, some of which—such as public attitudes toward the armed forces—cannot be predicted with any certainty.⁸

The AVF: Its Status and Its Problems

The AVF has been in operation for four full years. Yet, despite the fact that it has been shown to be generally feasible in aggregate statistical terms,⁹ it has produced consequences which serve to raise serious questions concerning its future viability, the quality of the defense that we are buying and the AVF's effect on our nation and society.

Among the most crucial issues concerning the AVF in 1977 are:

- ◆ Is the AVF solely a peacetime concept, and does it, therefore, fail to achieve some basic national security objectives?
- ◆ Does the AVF unfairly distribute the burdens of defense to various segments of the population?
- ◆ Will the AVF ultimately undermine the nation's defense capability through an erosion of public confidence in the military which leads to decreasing support for defense expenditures?
- ◆ Will the AVF ultimately undermine the level of patriotism in the American public?
- ◆ Will the AVF lead to greater isolation of the military from the rest of society?
- ◆ Does the nature of the AVF restrict the range of policy choices available to our leaders in using military forces to achieve national objectives?

Each of these broader national societal issues was recognized by the Gates Commission and dealt with on a logical basis. However, little empirical evidence was available then relating to these issues. Today, none of the issues have been resolved finally, but a greater body of experience and evidence has been established regarding the performance of the AVF, its projected future and the validity of the overall set of assumptions on which the commission's study was based.

AVF Costs

The concept of the "cost" of the AVF, as with any defense manpower cost concept, is subject to many definitions and interpretations.

The most obvious definition of "defense manpower cost" is the "defense payroll"—Active and Reserve

William R. King is professor of business administration at the Graduate School of Business of the University of Pittsburgh. He received a bachelor's degree from Pennsylvania State University and master's and Ph.D. degrees from Case Institute of Technology. He performed a study of the all-volunteer force in fall 1976 and reported on the results in testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee in March 1977. He is the author of several books, including *Systems Analysis and Project Management*.

military personnel appropriations, costs of direct-hire civilians, costs of family housing supplied to military personnel and military retired pay. The defense payroll was \$49.3 billion in Fiscal Year (FY) 1976. This represents more than 54 percent of the total defense budget—as contrasted with 43 percent in 1964.

Other definitions of defense manpower costs push the manpower proportion even higher. For instance, if the nonpay operating costs of recruiting, medical, training and commissary facilities are included in the definition, the total manpower cost becomes \$53 billion, or 58 percent of total defense outlays.

Whatever the definition, the large manpower expenditure levels, the rapid rise in manpower’s absolute cost and its proportion of the defense budget have led to overall concern, as well as to concern about the effect of the AVF on these costs. These concerns reflect the belief that manpower costs are increasing at a faster rate than our ability to absorb them in the defense budget. If this is so, manpower expenditures inevitably will channel resources away from weapons system procurement, thereby, in all likelihood, leading to an overall decrease in our defense capacity.

Volunteer, which included the budget cost for various pay raises, bonuses, recruiting and other expenses which clearly were associated with the “AVF decision.” The approximate \$3 billion annual Project *Volunteer* cost was publicized widely as the “cost of the all-volunteer force.” When other personnel-related budget increases are taken into account, total costs for the AVF of as high as \$5.6 billion per year may be calculated.¹¹

Future AVF Costs—Future manpower costs are of grave concern to those who believe that defense expenditures will be “capped” eventually in some sense. In such a case, the mandated nature of increases in manpower costs would tend to divert resources from weapons systems and other defense needs, thus reducing the nation’s overall defense capability.

The table shows Congressional Budget Office (CBO) estimates for defense manpower costs under current defense policy—that is, cost increases reflect inflation and increased retirement costs, but no policy changes. They show a potential 36-percent increase in defense manpower costs over the next four fiscal years.

These manpower cost figures are not presented as realistic by the CBO since the President’s budget

Defense Manpower Costs *

FY 1977	FY 1978	FY 1979	FY 1980	FY 1981
55.8	60.9	66.0	70.9	75.9

* Defense Manpower: Compensation Issues for Fiscal Year 1977, Background Paper Number 6, Congressional Budget Office, Washington, DC, 2 April 1976, Table 11, p 37.

Certainly, the AVF represents only one element of this tremendous manpower cost increase. Other important elements were the 1967 legislation which placed the pay of Federal civilians and military careerists on a par with private sector remuneration, the vastly increasing numbers of retired military personnel and changes in the enlisted/officer composition of the force which increased unit manpower costs while the total force size was decreasing.¹⁰

Historical AVF Costs—For FY 1971 through FY 1974, the DOD budget cost of the AVF was expressed officially in a separate budget category, Project

expressly entertains prospects for policy changes to reduce outlays as well as real manpower costs. However, they grossly illustrate the potential magnitude of the future defense manpower cost situation under current policy parameters. However, these costs may not be so unrealistic since significantly increased manpower costs may, in fact, be one of the few ways to sustain the AVF into the 1980s.

AVF Costs for Increased Force Levels—In addition to aggregate projections of the growing magnitude of manpower costs, a critical defense manpower issue is the future cost of the AVF under increased force levels.

Since the military establishment is meant to be an instrument of US policy, it is reasonable to ask how costs will behave should it be necessary to increase force levels. This is an important question because the current apparent viability and cost of the AVF is a direct result of the vastly decreased force levels which occurred with implementation of the AVF.

This important question has been addressed¹² using a General Research Corporation model on the basis of Project *Volunteer* incremental costs (about \$3 billion) and modest (\$310 million) “opportunity costs” which are the savings which now could be realized from a return to the draft. While neither of these cost concepts incorporate “total economic cost,” both are cost estimates which tend to make the AVF appear to be relatively more attractive than the draft in the current situation (because of the relatively modest savings associated with a return to the draft).

When the relevant incremental costs¹³ are taken into account, the incremental cost of increasing the enlisted force size more than about 10 percent becomes quite large under the AVF. For instance, the study estimates that the maintenance of a force of 3.1 million enlisted personnel (the Vietnam peak level) would cost \$29 billion more under the AVF than using the draft. At a force level of 4 million, the cost difference is a staggering \$67.5 billion more under the AVF.

This means that, on a budget cost basis, the AVF is essentially a peacetime concept and that any emergency situation probably would require reliance on an almost immediate return to a draft.

Military Manpower Requirements

One of the important factors which facilitated the transition to an AVF was the decrease in military manpower requirements created by the end of the Vietnam War. Military manpower peaked at about 3.55 million in FY 1968 but rapidly declined to below the pre-Vietnam level of about 2.4 million by FY 1972. Currently, total military manpower (FY 1976) is at the level of 2.08 million.

Clearly, this 41-percent reduction in military manpower from the Vietnam peak was a major facilitating factor in achieving the current situation in which all services are manned at or near their strength objectives.

Enlisted Accessions—One of the acid tests for the AVF always has been considered to be its ability to generate sufficient volunteers. The military services

require young and vigorous personnel, thus necessitating personnel turnover and continuing requirements for new enlistees from the 17 to 21 age group.

Much of the study and analysis which went into the AVF decision and the plans for the manner in which it would be implemented were focused toward assurance of an adequate supply of enlisted volunteers. Indeed, a primary recommendation of the Gates Commission was that military pay rates be increased to make military service relatively more attractive to this age group.

During the first year of the AVF, the Army fell more than 23,000 short of its recruiting objectives, and the DOD as a whole had a shortfall of 33,000. The services adjusted their recruiting personnel and practices, and an economic recession ensued, thus enabling the services to improve their performance in the second year.

The Future of AVF Recruiting—There is every indication that the outlook for AVF recruiting is not as bright as it has been in the recent past, even if no force size changes are undertaken. The primary reasons for this more negative outlook are declining future populations in the military-age population group, improved economic conditions and the outlook for military pay relative to civilian pay.

During the next 10 years, the United States will face a sizable decrease in the population of military-age youths. The 18-year-old male population will decline from 2.15 million in 1976 to about 1.7 million in the late 1980s and to a low of 1.6 million in the early 1990s.¹⁴ Thus, while the United States experienced peak populations in the relevant age groups during the period when the modern AVF was being implemented, it faces a sharply contrasting population situation in the next 10 to 15 years.

While it is never easy to forecast the economy, there has been an upturn over the recent year, and forecasts are generally for improved economic conditions over the next five years.

The CBO has forecast a decline in the unemployment rate from 7.9 percent in September 1976 to 4.2 percent in 1982, with corresponding declines in the rate for 18 to 19-year-old males from 19 percent to 10 percent.¹⁵ If this projection is valid, it means that the military will be forced to compete more directly with civilian employment opportunities for the ever-decreasing number of military-age youth.

By any measure, military pay has increased much more rapidly than civilian pay over the past decade. An Office of Naval Research study¹⁶ suggests that, when the differential costs of living of military and civilian personnel are taken into account, the real increase in pay for military E-1s (the lowest pay grade) has been 193.4 percent from 1964 to 1973, while the corresponding civilian production and nonsupervisory (nonagricultural) worker's pay increased in real terms only 10.3 percent during the same period.

These enormous increases in military enlisted pay relative to pay for comparable civilian employment have had significant impact on enlistments.¹⁷ Since "GI Bill" benefits expired at the end of calendar 1976, and since it is unlikely that comparable relative gains will occur in the future as they have in the recent past, real questions can be raised concerning the impact of pay and benefits on future recruiting.

This relatively unfavorable recruiting environment can be used to forecast that "... over the next five years substantial raises will have to be made to produce numbers and quality of military recruits."¹⁸

The magnitude of the recruiting problem facing the military is put into clear perspective by Johnston and Guy¹⁹ who estimate that the active duty military will have to recruit one out of every three "qualified and available"²⁰ male youths until 1980 and that this proportion increases to 40 percent of the qualified and available pool in the 1985-89 period. When Reserve requirements of 100,000 annual nonprior service accessions are taken into account, the ratios become 40 percent for 1975-80 and 50 percent for 1985-90. This means that, by the late 1980s, the military "total force" will be faced with the problem of recruiting one of every two qualified and available males in the population.

The Reserve Forces

Unlike the Active forces, whose present strength levels give the appearance of a viable AVF, the Reserve forces are experiencing significant quantity and quality problems.

These difficulties are especially important because the "total force policy"—in which integrated plans are made for "... all the resources available to perform the various national defense missions ..."²¹—relies so heavily on Reserve forces, and the enormous cost of an AVF expansion, which creates a greater need to rely on the Reserves.

Under the total force concept, Ready Reserve components are given heavy responsibility for augmenting the Active forces in an emergency. The selected Reserve must provide units to augment Active force units, and the Individual Ready Reserve (IRR) is the primary source of individuals trained for replacement and augmentation.

Since the United States no longer has an operational Selective Service System,²² these represent the only support available to Active forces for a perhaps prolonged period until a draft can be activated, implemented and begins to produce trained forces.

All Reserve component strength levels now are below Congressional floors, but the bulk of the shortfalls exist in the Army Reserve and Army National Guard where the shortfall is predicted to increase from 44,000 to 108,000 by the end of FY 1978. The projected reductions in IRR strengths also are serious. Enlisted strength projections show a decline by FY 1982 to 63 percent of the FY 1976 level.²³

The changing quality of the Reserve forces is reflected by significant decreases in upper mental categories and upper levels of educational attainment. This is in clear contrast to the situation existing in the Active forces where quality levels have held up reasonably well under the AVF.

The seriousness of these quality changes is pointed out when one considers the differences in learning ability and retention ability which would seem to be required in the Reserve forces. Unlike his active counterpart, the reservist cannot spend large blocks of time to learn and practice new skills. He must learn rapidly in his short "drill" or "camp" experiences, and he must retain these skills, without the opportunity for practice, while he is undertaking prolonged periods of unrelated civilian activities.

Attrition

One of the major problems facing the active duty AVF is attrition. Enlisted attrition in the Army was 106,596 in FY 1976. This means that significantly more enlisted personnel terminated their Army service prior to the expiration of their term of service than were separated routinely at the normal completion of their term (including retirees). About 70 percent of these separations prior to the expiration of the normal term of service are classified as "adverse"—for example, trainee

discharges, misconduct, expeditious discharges, unsuitability and unfitness—and a large proportion (about 80,000 for overall DOD) involved personnel in their first year of service. These first-year losses represent about 20 percent of total accessions for the period.²⁴

The impact of this attrition rate on manpower costs is direct and significant. The military expends funds to recruit, train, pay, house and clothe these individuals, and gets little in return. These separations, and the events preceding them, cannot but have negative impacts on military morale. Moreover, the social cost to the nation of creating this number of “failures,” and the consequent effect on recruiting of having significant numbers of “antimilitary salesmen” influencing the choices of potential enlistees, is staggering.²⁵

Other AVF Problems

Among the other areas in which the AVF has created consequences which may be of concern are combat and technical skills bonuses, physician shortages and the representativeness of the AVF.

Combat and Technical Skills Bonuses—The services have used various bonuses for enlistments and re-enlistments to fill otherwise unattractive (combat and sea duty) positions and positions requiring high levels of technical skills. DOD spent \$109.2 million on bonuses in FY 1976. Of the enlistment bonuses (\$67.8 million), almost 90 percent went to “combat arms” bonuses and about 10 percent to “technical skills” bonuses. Combat arms bonuses were given to more than 25,000 enlistees in FY 1976—an indication that even current high rates of military pay are not sufficiently attractive to attract adequate recruits to these high-risk jobs.

Physician Shortages—Physician shortages continue to plague the military services. Just as draft-motivated reservists are leaving the Reserve forces, the draft-motivated Berry plan is producing constantly decreasing numbers of physician accessions. Future flows of medical personnel depend largely on the services’ ability to attract volunteers for this vital skill area.

Representativeness of the AVF—The AVF is reasonably representative of the overall US population except in terms of the proportion of women and blacks.

Women make up only 5.3 percent of overall DOD strength—a significant increase from the 1.1 percent in 1964 and the 3.5 percent in 1974, but not even

close to their representation in the population or to the potential which many believe to exist.

The black proportion of the Army has increased to 23.7 percent as opposed to 16.6 percent for overall DOD. This contrasts with about an 11-percent representation in the population and suggests that blacks are carrying more than their “fair share” of the US defense burden.

Taking Another Look at the AVF

In the light of all of these AVF problems, it seems reasonable to consider, from the standpoint of the 20/20 hindsight of which we are all amply possessed, the assumptions made by the Gates Commission in its determination of the AVF’s feasibility and desirability. This “Monday-morning quarterbacking” is unfair to the commission, but it is revealing to examine these assumptions in the light of the evidence which has been developed since.

The Selective Service System

The most apparent “implementing assumption” of the AVF decision was that of an “effective standby draft.” This assumption is so apparent because Secretary Gates included it in the key topical sentence of his transmittal letter for the commission’s report, and a full chapter in the report is devoted to the standby draft.²⁶

Subsequent to implementation of the AVF, the Selective Service System was reduced to the level of a centralized planning activity whose basic task is to plan for the possible institution of a draft under future potential emergency conditions. All volunteer local draft board personnel have been deactivated so that the only remaining vestiges of an \$80 million agency which registered, classified, examined and inducted more than 10 million men in FY 1971, with the aid of thousands of volunteers, is a small Washington, DC, headquarters and personnel who maintain reactivation plans at the state level.

AVF Turnover Rates

The Gates Commission assumed that about 265,000 enlisted accessions per year would be required to support the current force level of approximately 2.1 million.²⁷ In fact, DOD plans to bring in between 400,000 to 470,000 new enlisted personnel each year over the next five years in order to sustain the 2.1 million level. Thus, the actual requirements for new accessions are

more than 50 percent higher than those which were assumed by the Gates Commission.

The Gates assumptions concerning enlisted turnover were that enlisted accession requirements would be about three-fourths of what they had been in the mixed force of volunteers and draftees.²⁸ In fact, turnover rates have increased significantly under the AVF despite the fact that all volunteers sign up for longer tours of duty than the two-year commitments which were required of draftees. Thus, despite the fact that one of the logical premises on which the Gates turnover assumptions are based is logically valid—that is, that increased average commitments should lead to decreased turnover (all other things being equal)—turnover has risen, not fallen, under the AVF.

Re-Enlistment Rates

Current plans calling for DOD to hold the number of enlisted personnel with more than four years service to less than 40 percent of the force are in contrast to the 48 percent which was assumed by the commission. Hence, whatever may have been the underlying validity of the Gates projections, events have not borne out the re-enlistment assumptions.

Demand-Reduction Programs

Among the key implementing assumptions of the Gates Commission Report are those involving a variety of “demand reduction” programs in DOD. These are programs which, in one way or another, are expected to reduce DOD’s requirements for its basic, and most difficult to obtain, resource—the qualified young man.

The basic theses of the Gates analysis were three-fold: first, that conscription, with its understated total cost for conscripts, induced the military to use manpower inefficiently; second, that the increased manpower costs of the AVF would motivate more efficient usage; and, third, that there were ample opportunities for such increased manpower efficiencies, and, hence, opportunities to reduce demand for young qualified men.

A wide variety of programs have the potential for such demand reductions. Among those explicitly treated by the Gates Commission are: capital substitution, civilianization and re-enlistment rate improvement. In contrast with the Gates assumptions, DOD has pursued none of these programs vigorously.

AVF Costs

Many of the Gates cost estimates are at variance with the cost realities of today and the future. For instance, current turnover rates have added to recruiting, training and change-of-status costs while the Gates Commission repeatedly refers to significant reductions in manpower costs which would result from anticipated decreases in turnover.²⁹

The precise magnitude of this cost difference is difficult to pinpoint, but the Gates Commission estimated a savings of more than \$800 million from reduced accessions, training requirements, and so forth.³⁰ A recent CBO study estimates that \$160 million could be saved by merely returning first-term attrition to 1974 levels.³¹ This implies a cost difference of about \$1 billion between the Gates assumptions and the actual cost impact of turnover.

Alternatives to the AVF

Since the performance of the AVF presents a “mixed picture,” it is wise for us to look into AVF alternatives.

Among those which might be considered are:

- ◆ A return to the draft.
- ◆ A “reserve-only” draft.
- ◆ A “better-managed” AVF.
- ◆ Universal military training.
- ◆ National service.
 - (a) Compulsory.
 - (b) Voluntary.

Return to the Draft

A natural alternative to the AVF is a return to the practice of conscripting recruits into the military. This is the system with which we are most familiar, and it would necessarily avoid many of the problems associated with the present and future AVF.

However, the draft alternative cannot be justified on the basis of significant cost savings unless dramatic pay decreases in the lower ranks are undertaken. Even then, the savings would not be as great as have been the budget costs of the AVF since many of the benefits which were offered to military personnel under the AVF have been institutionalized.

The annual savings to accrue from a return to the draft have been estimated between \$325 million and \$2.8 billion—the former figure being that of no pay decreases and the latter being the extreme case

involving the institution of poverty-level compensation for recruits.³²

One of the factors mitigating against the draft is public attitudes. In 1973, nearly 79 percent of Americans favored abolition of the draft, and, since many of the AVF's problems are not well known by the public, there is no reason to believe that the draft has wider public support now.³³

Reserve-Only Draft

A mixture of the draft and AVF which would alleviate some, but not all, of the AVF problems is a "Reserve-only" draft. Under such a plan, individuals would be drafted—probably on a lottery basis—into the IRR, given the essential training and, then, after some period, assume only the modest military responsibilities of a member of the IRR.

This alternative would resolve directly many of the problems which exist for the Reserves under the AVF, and it would provide a modest "draft inducement" to enlistment in the Active or Reserve forces. It would not be inordinately costly, but it would require the reinstatement of a Selective Service System—something that we probably will do eventually to provide us with a backup draft capability.

The primary disadvantages of such a system are the "hidden" economic and social costs of any draft and the fact that the plan does not address the broad range of problems which are facing the AVF.

A Better-Managed AVF

One of the alternatives to the current system is a better-managed AVF. This does not imply that the AVF has been mismanaged. Indeed, DOD has done an outstanding job of instituting a radically new system into a huge organization.

However, an awareness of the current AVF problems and a commitment to improve them is an essential prerequisite to development of a comprehensive plan for attainment of a better-managed force. Some of the elements of such a plan should be:

- ◆ Demand reduction programs—such as capital substitution for labor, increased use of women, increased overhead reductions, civilianization, greater use of contractor support and, encouragement of higher re-enlistment rates.
- ◆ Supply enhancement programs—such as those which will attract older recruits, prior-service persons

and individuals possessing civilian-acquired skills, decreased quality standards, increased paid advertising and educational incentive programs.

- ◆ Improvements in the quality of military life—to assure the fulfillment of recruiting promises and to improve the attitudes of enlisted personnel.
- ◆ Enlisted attrition reduction programs.

Universal Military Training

Universal military training (UMT) is the generic term used to describe various plans under which "everyone" would be given at least a minimum amount of military training on a compulsory basis. Such systems exist in countries such as Israel, Sweden, Switzerland and the USSR (although it is not officially recognized as such there).

Support for the UMT concept apparently is surprisingly strong among young people. However, it is interesting to note that the concept receives much higher support than do any of the several specific UMT plans which respondents were queried about in a 1965 survey.³⁴

High military training costs per recruit would make the UMT concept a costly one.³⁵ The additional cost would be at least \$20 billion annually, possibly much more depending on the necessity for increasing physical facilities, weapons, and so forth. If the military could reduce significantly its recruit training costs through increased class size or other means, the UMT concept might be less costly than it generally is perceived to be.

National Service

"National service" is another generic term which is used to describe a variety of plans having the common element of service in a variety of military and nonmilitary fields which are deemed to be in the nation's best interests.

A number of varieties of national service may be distinguished:

- ◆ Compulsory national service—in which all are required to serve in some military or nonmilitary capacity.
- ◆ Alternative national service—in which all would be required to serve, but those choosing nonmilitary service would be exempted from a military obligation.
- ◆ "Voluntary" national service—in which nonmilitary service is encouraged, but it does not exempt one from a military obligation.

- ◆ “Minimally coercive” national service—in which everyone is required to register and be evaluated, but there is no service commitment.

- ◆ “Pure” voluntary national service—in which no commitment for service (military or nonmilitary) exists but such service is encouraged and facilitated.

The United States today has a purely voluntary system of the latter variety since both military and nonmilitary service programs such as the Peace Corps are encouraged, but not required of anyone. The “voluntary” system, (#3), is something of a misnomer since it is the system which existed in the United States during the draft era.

The other options are of greater interest:

Minimally Coercive National Service—Under this system, all Americans would be required to register, to take medical and aptitude tests and to be counseled concerning the various military and nonmilitary service options which are available. Diagnosis of physical and educational problems also would be provided so that, even if the individual did not choose to serve, he or she could be referred to the most appropriate medical care or educational programs. Such a system might include a backup draft to accommodate military requirements should the voluntary choice process not fulfill them. However, evidence suggests that defense personnel requirements might be met without resort to a draft.

Alternative National Service—This national service concept would involve a commitment on the part of everyone to serve in some capacity. Those who chose to enter nonmilitary service would be exempt from military service. However, quotas or a draft for the military would be required to ensure achievement of military requirements.

Compulsory National Service—This is the most coercive form of national service. It would involve a draft into various forms of service with the forms of service and the selection of individuals to perform various services being determined “by the system” largely on the basis of national goals and priorities rather than as a matter of individual preference.

All of the various forms of national service have the advantage of enabling the nation to pursue national goals with greater effectiveness. Moreover, even the least coercive option should serve to resolve many of the current problems of the AVF because it would require registration for service (and hence facilitate the

use of the draft in emergencies) and provide a greater number of youths with information about military life, thereby increasing the likelihood of their enlisting.³⁶

Additionally, such systems directly address the severe youth unemployment problem³⁷ through providing vocational testing and counseling for all, and job training and experience for those who participate.

The registration, evaluation and counseling element of even the minimally coercive national service alternative also would serve to:

- ◆ Identify and assess the skills and deficiencies of young Americans.
- ◆ Prescribe remedial or skill-enhancing activities which the individual may wish to consider.
- ◆ Offer factual information concerning a wide range of service and training opportunities for which the individual may be suited.
- ◆ Facilitate the channeling of resources into critical areas of national need.

Of course, the cost of any national service program would be high—although it could be accomplished for much less than many believe through the cooperation of existing private service and volunteer agencies and through the use of volunteers as leaders and trainers. The benefits to the nation from such a system—in terms of work accomplished in our cities, parks, waterways and shores—as well as in benefits to the people who participate, are potentially enormous.

Summary

The current AVF has produced some undesirable consequences. Further problems can be foreseen that will reduce the AVF to a peacetime activity that can be prepared to cope with significant emergencies only at great cost and with great delays. Such a force reduces our international credibility as well as our ability to defend ourselves and to meet our worldwide commitments.

The time has come to conduct a searching and candid evaluation of the AVF, its effectiveness, its costs and its impact on our society. In doing so, we should examine various alternatives to the AVF from the overall perspective of our national goals. Only through such an analysis of alternatives will we be able to choose that system which will serve us best in both peace and war.

Notes

1. With the exception of a brief period in 1947-48, conscription into the military had been practiced continuously since 1940.
2. Statement of President Richard M. Nixon, 27 March 1969.
3. See *The Report of the President's Commission on an All-Volunteer Armed Force*, The Macmillan Co., NY, 20 February 1970, p 1.
4. *Ibid.*, p iii.
5. Martin Binkin and John D. Johnston, *All Volunteer Armed Forces: Progress, Problems and Prospects*, Report for the US Senate Committee on Armed Services, The Brookings Institution, Washington, DC, 1 June 1973, p 25.
6. For instance, see A. DeStefano, "Is All Well With the Volunteer Military?," *Intellect*, May-June 1976, pp 660-62; and D. Cortright, "Our Volunteer Army: Can a Democracy Stand It?," *The Nation*, 16 October 1976, pp 367-62.
7. For instance, see A. N. Sabrosky, *The First Two Years of the Modern Volunteer Army: A Preliminary Assessment*, Paper delivered at the 1975 Biennial Conference of the Inter-University Seminar on Armed Forces and Society, Chicago, IL, 16-18 October 1975.
8. *Defense Manpower: The Keystone of National Security*, Report to the President and the Congress, Defense Manpower Commission, Washington, DC, April 1976.
9. For example, see Binkin and Johnston, *op. cit.*; and *The All-Volunteer Armed Force: Current Status and Prospects*, Department of Defense, Washington, DC, 17 December 1976.
10. Officers and officer candidates constituted over 14 percent of the active duty force in 1975—a significant increase from the less than 12-percent proportion in 1967.
11. See Cortright, *op. cit.*, pp 357-61.
12. A. Uscher and D. Huck, *Is the AVF a Peacetime Concept?*, Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (Manpower and Reserve Affairs), Washington, DC, 7 October 1974.
13. Only those cost differences that would result from increasing force size using the AVF versus increasing it using the draft, and not other costs such as housing, food, and so forth which would be the same in any circumstances.
14. *Population Estimates and Projections*, Current Population Reports, Series P-25, N601, Bureau of the Census, Washington, DC, October 1975, Table 8.
15. *Employment and Earnings*, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Washington, DC, January 1976; and *Defense Manpower: Compensation Issues for Fiscal Year 1977*, Background Paper Number 6, Congressional Budget Office, Washington, DC, 2 April 1976.
16. Tulay Demirles, *Adjusted Consumer Price Index for Military Personnel and a Comparison of Real Civilian and Military Earnings, 1964-1973*, Technical Memorandum, TM-1200, Office of Naval Research Project NR 347-024, George Washington University, Washington, DC, 1 November 1974, p 9.
17. David W. Grissmer, *The Supply of Enlisted Volunteers in the Post Draft Environment: An Analysis Based on Monthly Data, 1970-1975*, RAND Conference on Defense Manpower, 3 February 1976.
18. *Defense Manpower: Compensation Issues for Fiscal Year 1977*, *op. cit.*, p 15.
19. John D. Johnston and Joseph Guy, *The All-Volunteer Force: Can It Be Sustained?*, Paper presented to the Washington Operations Research Council, 5 April 1976.
20. Defined as those who are not institutionalized, unqualified or enrolled in college, but including college dropouts.
21. *The Guard and Reserve in the Total Force*, Department of Defense, Washington, DC, September 1975.
22. See *Hearings on the Selective Service System*, Subcommittee on Investigations and the Committee on Armed Forces, US House of Representatives 94th Congress, Second Session, Washington, DC, 1976.
23. Data and estimates provided by the Office of the Deputy Secretary of Defense (Reserve Affairs), Washington, DC.
24. All data provided by the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (Manpower and Reserve Affairs), Washington, DC.
25. There is evidence to suggest that "friends of same age group" and "former Army personnel" together constitute the single most important advisory group for enlisted personnel. See, for instance, *Survey Estimates of Opinions on Incentives for Enlistment*, DAPO-PMP Report 67-71-E, US Army Personnel Management Development Office, Office of Personnel Operations, Washington, DC.
26. *The Report of the President's Commission on an All-Volunteer Armed Force*, *op. cit.*, p iii and Chapter 10.
27. Based on interpolation from *Ibid.*, Table 4-VI, p 43.
28. *Ibid.*, p 15.
29. For instance, see *Ibid.*, pp 8, 13, 15 and 28, and Staff Study 1-1-4.
30. *Ibid.*, p 29.
31. *The Costs of Defense Manpower: Issues for 1977*, Congressional Budget Office, Washington, DC, January 1977, p 28.
32. *Fact Sheet: The Cost of Defense Manpower and the Volunteer Force*, Department of Defense, Washington, DC, February 1975.
33. D. R. Segal, "Civil-Military Relations in the Mass Public," *Armed Forces and Society*, February 1975, pp 215-29.
34. L. Bramson, "The High School Student, the Draft, and Voluntary National Service Alternatives," in Sol Tax, *The Draft, A Handbook of Facts and Alternatives*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, IL, 1967, pp 177-87.
35. *Military Manpower Training Report for Fiscal Year 1977*, Department of Defense, Washington, DC, March 1976.
36. *Attitudes and Motivations Toward Enlistment in the U.S. Army*, Opinion Research Corporation, April 1974, pp xi-xix.
37. *Policy Options for the Teenage Unemployment Problem*, Background Paper Number 3, Congressional Budget Office, Washington, DC, 21 September 1976.

To view "The All-Volunteer Armed Forces: Status, Prospects and Alternatives" as it was originally published in September 1977, visit <https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Portals/7/military-review/Archives/English/JF-22/Original/King.pdf>.